

## Step One

Back when the original G.I. Joe and Transformers were life, I had a lot of friends and a fun existence and life was good. Even school. I had friends and did well.

Elementary school was a pretty, well, unremarkable time for me, meaning I didn't have any traumatic events that I can recall that would merit recording in this Step One.

The summer between elementary and middle school was as if a nuclear warhead exploded within me. Puberty and porn.

Several of my best friends used to play war around the neighborhood. We made forts and hideouts in the woods. One day one of them got their hands on some magazines - Hustler, or some such, and we had the perfect hiding spots to check them out. I was excited because I had heard about these and had not a clue what I was looking at, but I liked it.

Less and less did we use our forts for paintball and laser tag and more for checking out new magazines we had scored dumpster diving around the barracks on post for aluminum cans. We made out like kings.

In middle school I learned many things: One that I was color blind and other was I wasn't very good in math and reading. There were girls, too. They liked me well enough and I was a friend and friendly to everyone I interacted with.

In 6<sup>th</sup> grade we all had the same class schedule for the year. In every class if the teachers referenced something by colors or numbers, I became nearly paralyzed with anxiety because I felt lost and confused. On the outside I wouldn't show it. I kept a calm appearance, but I was struggling. And when I struggled, frustration simmered and then my mind would wander and fixate on the images in my stash and magazines. My happy place.

I began to struggle more and more through the rest of middle school. My friends became fewer still as my withdrawing and isolation grew. I felt the girls I liked became less interested, or interesting to me, even, because they weren't my fantasy woman in my mind until I put them there. In my dream world, I was everything I couldn't be. Smart, popular, athletic. The in-crowd. But, I didn't let their social rejection get me down. I had it good, right?. No one bullied me and I was just a nameless, faceless kid in the crowd, right?

My father brought porn into the house at one point in my 8<sup>th</sup> grade. When he was downstairs recording from one VCR to the other, I would listen to the dialogue, bad acting, and the sounds of sex since my bedroom had been at the top of the stairs. Now I had new layers and dimension to my ever-growing fantasy.

He underestimated mine and my brother's ability to find things we were not supposed to. My brother found and bragged to some of his friends to come over and watch my father's tapes when the parents were out. And like the ghost I was, no one noticed me noticing him putting it back in its hiding spot. So, when the opportunity came for me to be alone to watch this tape I had only heard from upstairs, I was instantly hooked.

Now I had seen how it's done - the mechanics of sex and how men are supposed to do it and women are supposed to want it. It took a fraction of a second to take this knowledge and incorporate it into newer ways to develop my masturbatory fantasy world of all powerful awesomeness where I wanted to be.

My friends become fewer again and then none at all when my family moved overseas. I loved Germany. It was historic and exciting. High school in Germany was a blur that, I can honestly say, gave me no remarkable memories that impacted my life. Neither good nor bad. I was there and I did what I needed to do to graduate. I didn't want to get involved. My high school life was divided into three parts: school work, fantasy and masturbation, and checking

out historical places. Three things I enjoyed best alone.

I enlisted in the military shortly after returning to the United States after graduating. It was good for me. I did good things, won many awards and decorations along the way. I was in that deployment rut that many came to dread after 9/11, save more me. I loved it. I was doing what the Army and the good Lord trained me to do. Then I got shot, got in firefights, blown up, shot again, more firefights. Hold up one God damn minute, I shouted. I'm not infantry! Why and I in the middle of the shit? I'm supply, damn it. I was wrong. I was whatever whoever was in charge needed me to be. So I learned fast to do many things that did incredible destruction on people. Nightmares soon followed.

I didn't fear death anymore. I still don't. I fear sleep. I attempted suicide 5 times. I fear those dreams.

I found more ways to cope. I became distant and withdrawn, I drank, I acted out and manipulated people who came to respect my reputation in the unit between combat rotations. I didn't think I was doing anything wrong because I was getting things done and still winning awards. That is, until, I was found out. My addictions and acting out with subordinates and pornography got me separated from the service with a Bad Conduct Discharge. I was decorated so it wasn't Dishonorable, but it was conditional. I had to register as a sex offender.

The depression that followed dumped me deeper into the abyss that I hadn't been in since attempting suicide. So, when I wasn't at my job, I was acting out like a mad man. It eventually evolved into acting out at work. Who cared, right? I was unlovable.

Then I met the woman who was crazy enough to become my wife. With her I managed to climb out of my depression, but I still had this addiction. She knew about my past, but I did everything imaginable to hide my addiction. Then I was found out by her. It was tenuous, to say the least. We went to therapist after therapist and until then, I had accepted that it was me who needed the real help. I was directed to SA.

I went through the motions. Read the books. Held the hands of others and did the cult-like chanting to no avail. After 8 months of white knuckling, thinking I could be cured by association, I crashed. And crashed again. And again.

When I felt the worst, and headed to a new low, seeing how much this roller coaster has been putting my wife and daughters through, I stood up, again. This time I didn't stand up alone. I stood up with her help because she was going to seek recovery with me for herself.

Seeking recovering. Not hoping to find it like I did when would lose a tiny model part or screw in the carpet to look for, hoping to get lucky. I seek it.

And here I am. You seek and you shall find. Or find one's path. I have found connection for the first time in a group of anonymous, yet, oddly familiar strangers who are all my new friends. A new faith and renewed, deeper, real connection with my wife and family and a new path of my own to take in my recovery.